

Environmental Education Assessment

March 16, 2001

Environmental education is key to giving people at all age levels the knowledge they need to understand how their individual actions, along with other's actions, impact soil, water, habitats, and other resources. Communicating accurate information about natural resources helps build a long-term foundation of knowledge in the public. Conveying information about state trust land management in an engaging and understandable way, given its complexity, can be difficult. Yet, public education is critical in building a strong foundation of understanding and support for the Department's management activities.

In the past ten years, federal, state, and local government agencies, environmental groups, schools and concerned citizens have developed numerous education and stewardship programs. Coordinating educational efforts remains a challenge, to avoid duplication and "reinventing the wheel", but has improved greatly in the past few years.

Numerous environmental education activities are being conducted in the landscape planning area. Most of the activities are being conducted through the Bellingham School District, the City of Bellingham, and Whatcom County. Currently no organized environmental education activities are occurring on state trust land in the planning area. There is some research and education happening on the Lake Louise Natural Resources Conservation Area (NRCA), but these efforts are not formalized with the department. The following describes the major educational efforts.

Bellingham School District

The Bellingham School District manages the Gordon Carter Environmental Site, approximately 135 forested acres located at the south end of Lake Whatcom near Brannian Creek (Section 27, T37N, R4E). Each spring all sixth grade students in the district visit the site for two days. The students are transported each day as there are no overnight facilities. All education occurs outdoors and is focused on "traveling the terrain", a series of five educational stations emphasizing habitat, biodiversity and interdependence. In addition, all third grade classes in the district visit this site for one day in the spring.

Joint Lake Whatcom Management Program

The City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, and Water District #10 support a coordinated educational and community outreach program in the watershed through the Joint Lake Whatcom Management Program. For the year 2000, educational efforts focused on the three priority water quality concerns that have been identified through the program: nutrients, fecal coliform, and other contaminants.

Citizens can get information about the Joint Lake Whatcom Management Program from the Water Whys newsletter, the Lake Whatcom web site, the Lake Whatcom information notebook and data catalog at the Bellingham Public Library, and various educational displays. Public meetings, which are later televised, provide an opportunity for citizens to get information about the Management Program and to offer their comments and

suggestions. In addition, in 1999 a Lake Whatcom Citizen Task Force was established which reports to the Management Committee.

City of Bellingham

The City of Bellingham has an integrated watershed education program. Some examples of current public education programs are listed below.

- **Water Quality Test Kits** (available for loan to measure temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen and flow).
- **Macroinvertebrate Kit**
- **Water/Wastewater Education** (“Sharing Our Watershed: Mt. Baker to Bellingham Bay is a required field trip for 5th grade classes in the Bellingham School District. This program covers concepts around watersheds, water treatment and wastewater treatment.)
- **Watershed Public Service Announcement Contest** (students that participate in the 5th grade watershed/water treatment/wastewater treatment program create PSAs and the winning PSA is aired on local television.)
- **Northwest Washington Fair Booth**
- **School Curriculum** (City provides free curriculum materials to teachers at local schools. The materials cover watershed, water treatment and wastewater treatment concepts for ages K-Adult.)

Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

Currently no organized education activities occur on DNR state trust lands in the planning area. DNR is involved in numerous educational activities in other parts of the state. Environmental education activities statewide include the following.

- **Students in the Watershed** (high school students teach other students about watershed processes and natural resources)
- **Discover Washington’s Natural Resources Teacher workshops** (summer educational workshops to educate teachers about natural resources)
- **Arbor Day**
- **Fire Safety** (curriculum for grades K-3)
- **Natural Resources Youth Camp** (Cispus Learning Center; youth 12-16 years)
- **“Nature Greets Technology”** (website contest in coordination with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction)